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MAY MEETING, 1875.

A stated monthly meeting was held on the 13th instant, at 11 o'clock A. M., Vice-President ADAMS in the chair.

In the absence of the Recording Secretary, Mr. SMITH was appointed Secretary *pro tempore*.

The record of the April meeting was read and approved.

The Librarian read his monthly list of donors to the Library.

The Corresponding Secretary reported a letter of acceptance from Mr. C. F. Adams, Jr., who had been chosen a Resident Member at the last meeting.

Dr. ELLIS then spoke of the course of lectures delivered before the Lowell Institute several years ago, by members of this Society, and said he had received a letter from Mr. Lowell with regard to another course on a similar plan. He moved, —

That the Vice-President, Mr. ADAMS, with two associates to be selected by him, be a committee to provide and arrange for a course of lectures to be delivered by request of Mr. Lowell, next season, before the Lowell Institute, on subjects appropriate to the centennial of the nation, especially on themes relating to Massachusetts and New England.

The motion was unanimously adopted.

On motion of the Librarian, an application from Professor Park to copy certain letters in the archives of the Society, relating to church affairs at Northampton, was granted.

Mr. FROTHINGHAM read a letter from Henry E. Alvord, of Washington, proposing to sell the original portrait of General Joseph Warren, by Copley, formerly at Greenfield; and, on his motion, the subject was referred to the Council.

Mr. APPLETON exhibited an impression in gold of the large medal of Washington, by Manly, 1790, struck from the dies in their original state, before any change was made. He stated that though the medal is well known, and by no means rare in bronze, this is the only specimen in gold of which he had ever heard.

Dr. HOLMES read the following poem on the Battle of Bunker Hill, which finds a place in these Proceedings by the courtesy of the publishers of it, Messrs. J. R. Osgood & Co.

GRANDMOTHER'S STORY OF BUNKER-HILL BATTLE:

AS SHE SAW IT FROM THE BELFRY.

'Tis like stirring living embers, when, at eighty, one remembers
All the aching and the quakings of "the times that tried men's souls;"
When I talk of *Whig* and *Tory*, when I tell the *Rebel* story,
To you the words are ashes, but to me they're burning coals.

I had heard the muskets' rattle of the April running battle;
Lord Percy's hunted soldiers, I can see their red coats still;
But a deadly chill comes o'er me, as the day looms up before me,
When a thousand men lay bleeding on the slopes of Bunker's Hill.

'Twas a peaceful summer's morning, when the first thing gave us warning
Was the booming of the cannon from the river and the shore:
"Child," says grandma, "what's the matter, what is all this noise and
clatter?"

Have those scalping Indian devils come to murder us once more?"

Poor old soul! my sides were shaking, in the midst of all my quaking,
To hear her talk of Indians when the guns began to roar:
She had seen the burning village, and the slaughter and the pillage,
When the Mohawks killed her father with their bullets through his door.

Then I said, "Now, dear old granny, don't you fret and worry any,
For I'll soon come back and tell you whether this is work or play;
There can't be mischief in it, so I won't be gone a minute" —
For a minute then I started. I was gone the live-long day.

No time for bodice-lacing or for looking-glass grimacing;
Down my hair went as I hurried, tumbling half-way to my heels;
God forbid your ever knowing, when there's blood around her flowing,
How the lonely, helpless daughter of a quiet household feels!

In the street I heard a thumping; and I knew it was the stumping
Of the Corporal, our old neighbor, on that wooden leg he wore,
With a knot of women round him, — it was lucky I had found him,
So I followed with the others, and the Corporal marched before.

They were making for the steeple, — the old soldier and his people;
The pigeons circled round us as we climbed the creaking stair.
Just across the narrow river — oh, so close it made me shiver!
Stood a fortress on the hill-top that but yesterday was bare.

Not slow our eyes to find it; well we knew who stood behind it,
Though the earth-work hid them from us, and the stubborn walls were
dumb:

Here were sister, wife, and mother, looking wild upon each other,
And their lips were white with terror as they said, **THE HOUR HAS COME!**

The morning slowly wasted, not a morsel had we tasted,
And our heads were almost splitting with the cannons' deafening thrill,

When a figure tall and stately round the rampart strode sedately;
It was PRESCOTT, one since told me; he commanded on the hill.

Every woman's heart grew bigger when we saw his manly figure,
With the banyan buckled round it, standing up so straight and tall;
Like a gentleman of leisure who is strolling out for pleasure,
Through the storm of shells and cannon-shot he walked around the wall.

At eleven the streets were swarming, for the red-coats' ranks were
forming;

At noon in marching order they were moving to the piers;
How the bayonets gleamed and glistened, as we looked far down and
listened

To the trampling and the drum-beat of the belted grenadiers!

At length the men have started, with a cheer (it seemed faint-hearted),
In their scarlet regimentals, with their knapsacks on their backs,
And the reddening, rippling water, as after a sea-fight's slaughter,
Round the barges gliding onward blushed like blood along their tracks.

So they crossed to the other border, and again they formed in order;
And the boats came back for soldiers, came for soldiers, soldiers still:
The time seemed everlasting to us women faint and fasting, —
At last they're moving, marching, marching proudly up the hill.

We can see the bright steel glancing all along the lines advancing —
Now the front rank fires a volley — they have thrown away their shot;
For behind their earthwork lying, all the balls above them flying,
Our people need not hurry; so they wait and answer not.

Then the Corporal, our old cripple (he would swear sometimes and
tippie), —

He had heard the bullets whistle (in the old French war) before, —
Calls out in words of jeering, just as if they all were hearing, —
And his wooden leg thumps fiercely on the dusty belfry floor: —

“ Oh! fire away, ye villains, and earn King George's shillin's,
But ye'll waste a ton of powder before a 'rebel' falls;
You may bang the dirt and welcome, they're as safe as Dan'l Malcolm
Ten foot beneath the gravestone that you've splintered with your balls!”

In the hush of expectation, in the awe and trepidation
Of the dread approaching moment, we are wellnigh breathless all;
Though the rotten bars are failing on the rickety belfry railing,
We are crowding up against them like the waves against a wall.

Just a glimpse (the air is clearer), they are nearer, — nearer, — nearer,
When a flash — a curling smoke-wreath — then a crash — the steeple
shakes —

The deadly truce is ended; the tempest's shroud is rended;
Like a morning mist it gathered, like a thunder-cloud it breaks!

Oh the sight our eyes discover as the blue-black smoke blows over!
The red-coats stretched in windrows as a mower rakes his hay;

Here a scarlet heap is lying, there a headlong crowd is flying
Like a billow that has broken and is shivered into spray.

Then we cried, "The troops are routed! they are beat—it can't be doubted!

God be thanked, the fight is over!" — Ah! the grim old soldier's smile!
"Tell us, tell us why you look so?" (we could hardly speak, we shook so);

"Are they beaten? Are they beaten? ARE they beaten?" — "Wait a while."

Oh the trembling and the terror! for too soon we saw our error:
They are baffled, not defeated; we have driven them back in vain;
And the columns that were scattered, round the colors that were tattered,
Toward the sullen silent fortress turn their belted breasts again.

All at once, as we are gazing, lo, the roofs of Charlestown blazing!
They have fired the harmless village; in an hour it will be down!
The Lord in heaven confound them, rain his fire and brimstone round them, —

The robbing, murdering red-coats, that would burn a peaceful town!

They are marching, stern and solemn; we can see each massive column
As they near the naked earth-mound with the slanting walls so steep.
Have our soldiers got faint-hearted, and in noiseless haste departed?
Are they panic-struck and helpless? Are they palsied or asleep?

Now! the walls they're almost under! scarce a rod the foes asunder!
Not a firelock flashed against them! up the earthwork they will swarm!
But the words have scarce been spoken, when the ominous calm is broken,
And a bellowing crash has emptied all the vengeance of the storm!

So again, with murderous slaughter, pelted backwards to the water,
Fly Pigot's running heroes and the frightened braves of Howe;
And we shout, "At last they're done for, it's their barges they have run for:

They are beaten, beaten, beaten; and the battle's over now!"

And we looked, poor timid creatures, on the rough old soldier's features,
Our lips afraid to question, but he knew what we would ask:
"Not sure," he said; "keep quiet, — once more, I guess, they'll try it —
Here's damnation to the cut-throats!" — then he handed me his flask,

Saying, "Gal, you're looking shaky; have a drop of old Jamaiky;
I'm afeard there'll be more trouble afore the job is done;"
So I took one scorching swallow; dreadful faint I felt and hollow,
Standing there from early morning when the firing was begun.

All through those hours of trial I had watched a calm clock dial,
As the hands kept creeping, creeping, — they were creeping round to four,
When the old man said, "They're forming with their bagonets fixed for storming:
It's the death-grip that's a coming, — they will try the works once more."

With brazen trumpets blaring, the flames behind them glaring,
The deadly wall before them, in close array they come;
Still onward, upward toiling, like a dragon's fold uncoiling, —
Like the rattlesnake's shrill warning the reverberating drum!

Over heaps all torn and gory — shall I tell the fearful story,
How they surged above the breastwork, as a sea breaks over a deck;
How driven, yet scarce defeated, our worn-out men retreated,
With their powder-horns all emptied, like the swimmers from a wreck?

It has all been told and painted; as for me, they say I fainted,
And the wooden-legged old Corporal stumped with me down the stair.
When I woke from dreams affrighted, the evening lamps were lighted, —
On the floor a youth was lying; his bleeding breast was bare.

And I heard through all the flurry, "Send for WARREN! hurry! hurry!"
Tell him here's a soldier bleeding, and he'll come and dress his wound!"
Ah! we knew not, till the morrow told its tale of death and sorrow,
How the starlight found him stiffened on the dark and bloody ground.

Who the youth was, what his name was, where the place from which he
came was,
Who had brought him from the battle, and had left him at our door,
He could not speak to tell us; but 'twas one of our brave fellows,
As the homespun plainly showed us which the dying soldier wore.

For they all thought he was dying, as they gathered round him cry-
ing, —
And they said, "Oh, how they'll miss him!" and, "What *will* his mother
do?"
Then his eyelids just unclosing like a child's that has been dozing,
He faintly murmured, "Mother!" — and — I saw his eyes were blue.

— "Why, grandma, how you're winking!" — Ah, my child, it sets me
thinking
Of a story not like this one. Well, he somehow lived along;
So we came to know each other, and I nursed him like a — mother,
Till at last he stood before me, tall, and rosy-cheeked, and strong.

And we sometimes walked together in the pleasant summer weather;
— "Please to tell us what his name was?" — Just your own, my little
dear, —
There's his picture Copley painted: we became so well acquainted
That — in short, that's why I'm grandma, and you children all are
here!

Mr. TUTTLE presented, in the name of Mr. George F. Gray, of Dover, N. H., a heavy brass knocker, formerly affixed to the door of the house of the Rev. Dr. Belknap, in Dover. He made the following remarks, —

A few days since I received from Mr. George F. Gray, of Dover, N. H., a gentleman well known to me, this venerable brass door-

knocker, taken from the house once owned and occupied by the Rev. Dr. Belknap, minister in Dover from 1767 to 1787, suggesting that it be given to this Society. I am sure any thing that relates to this great and accomplished historian, the principal founder of this Society, will find welcome here.

I have a vivid recollection of this venerable mansion, known in the neighborhood as the "Old Belknap House," as it appeared thirty years ago. I never passed it without a feeling of awe and reverential respect. It was a large, plain, two-story, wooden structure, of the New England type, without paint, weather-beaten and dark with age,—this brass knocker being the only bright thing on its exterior,—standing in a field on the north side of Silver Street, facing south, and overlooking the lower falls of the Cocheco River, the site of the memorable Indian massacre of June, 1689. It commanded a fine view of the surrounding country, especially northward and eastward, and must have been one of the best houses in the town when built. Dr. Belknap purchased it in March, 1768, of Tobias Randall; moved into it June following; and lived there till February, 1787, when he removed to Boston. It is noteworthy that he paid for it, according to his diary, by giving two promissory notes, a transaction characteristic of those times. He sold it June, 1789, to Charles Clapham. The house continued in possession of respectable families down to 1855, when it was torn down to give place to the High School-house of Dover. This knocker was coveted by many citizens of Dover on account of its interesting associations; but one of the heirs of the last proprietor, Mr. Nathaniel Watson, desiring to retain it himself, took it from the door and kept it till he passed it over to Mr. Gray, not long since. I have the affidavit of Mr. Watson, containing a narrative of his knowledge of its history.

It was in this house that Dr. Belknap conceived his plan of writing a history of New Hampshire, and executed a greater part of it, his chief literary undertaking. It was while residing here that he established his reputation as an historian, and became widely known among men of letters. This antiquated relic visibly connects us with his domestic fireside. In the long years of literary and professional toil, how often must his meditations have been interrupted by the sharp metallic sound of this instrument! How many times it has summoned him to the altar and to the grave! to the house of festivity and the house of sorrow! I have just received a letter from Mr. Reuben H. Green, a native of Dover, now living at Winslow, in Maine, at nearly ninety-two years of age, who speaks of Dr. Belknap's house, and adds: "My father's house was situated on part of the original Belknap lot, on which were several apple-trees which had been engrafted by Dr. Belknap. I remember perfectly the day on which the Belknap family left Dover, Dr. Belknap's son John bringing, in a bag, a favorite cat, and leaving it with my mother. The doctor subsequently visited Dover and dined with my father, at which time he probably sold the house. I remember his look perfectly, and I doubt not I should recognize his portrait now." The father of the writer was Dr. Ezra Green, of the class of 1765, of Harvard College.

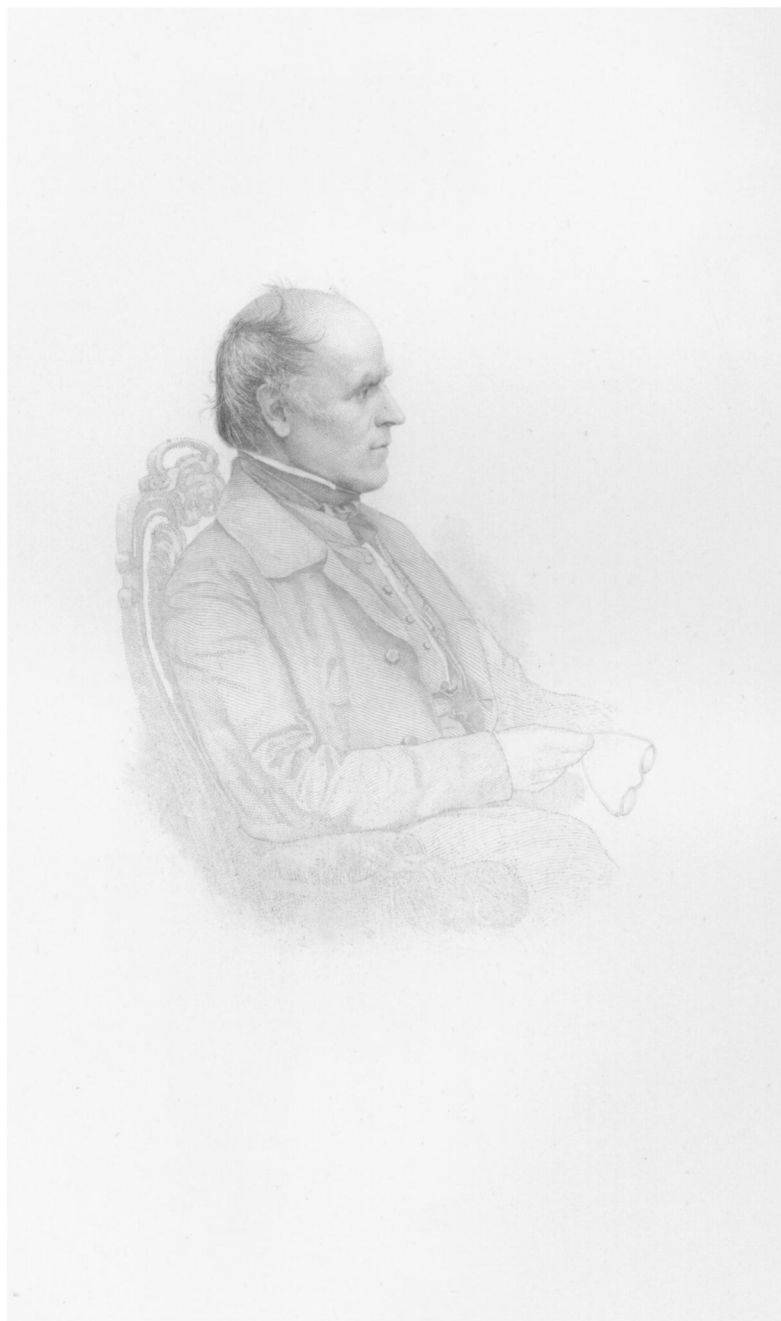
The thanks of the Society were voted for the gift.

Dr. HOLMES said, that, after the demolition of the Hancock house, in Beacon Street, he had placed the knocker formerly in use there, which was presented to him by his classmate, Charles Hancock, Esq., on the door of the Holmes house, so-called, in Cambridge, the headquarters, in 1775, of General Ward.

Voted, That the regular meetings of the Society for July and August be omitted this year, unless the members shall be specially called together by direction of the Vice-President.

The Vice-President communicated a letter from William T. Barker, of Ipswich, England, relating to the Appleton, Franklin, Lincoln, and Hall families; and one from Mr. W. W. Evans, of New York, accompanying the gift of an engraving of Washington, and of a eulogy on the character of Washington,—for which the thanks of the Society were ordered.

The following memoir of the late Charles Sprague was handed in by Mr. E. QUINCY, who was appointed to prepare it for the Proceedings:—



MEMOIR

OF

CHARLES SPRAGUE.

BY EDMUND QUINCY.

FEW lives extending over more than fourscore years have been less eventful than that of CHARLES SPRAGUE; and yet there are not many that are more justly interesting to the student of character, and more full of instruction and encouragement to those who are striving after self-improvement under difficulties, or endeavoring to enrich a life devoted to business by the pursuits of literature. He was born in Boston on the 26th of October, 1791, and died in the city of his birth on the 22d of January, 1875, in the eighty-fourth year of his age. His long life was spent, with scarcely the exception of a day, within the limits of his native city. He was never beyond the line of New England, and but twice beyond that of Massachusetts; when in his youth he went into Connecticut, once in pursuit of an evading debtor, and again to bring home the body of a near connection who had died there. More than forty-five years ago — August, 1829 — he delivered his poem entitled “Curiosity” before the Society of Phi Beta Kappa at Cambridge, since which time he had never visited the University or its seat. He was a Bostonian of the Bostonians; his handsome face, beaming with intelligence and kindness, was familiar daily to the eyes of his fellow-citizens for more than half a century, — regarded with admiration and respect by those who knew him little, and with love and admiration by those who knew him most. He did not share the nomadic propensities of the restless majority of his countrymen, but was content to sit at home and view foreign lands through the eyes of others, knowing them better and more intelligently thus than the greater part of the modern mob of sight-seeing Americans.

He came of an excellent New-England stock. Though none of his ancestors reached the high places of our colonial history, they belonged to that intelligent, industrious, God-

fearing middle class whose solid virtues were the foundations on which our free institutions and all our strength and prosperity rest. His emigrating ancestor on his father's side, William Sprague, was one of the early settlers of Hingham, in 1636; and his mother, Joanna Thayer, of Braintree, was directly descended from Peregrine White, the first-born of the Old Plymouth Colony. His father, Samuel Sprague, a mason by trade, was one of that sterling band of Boston mechanics who held up the hands of Otis, and Warren, and the Adamses in the body-meetings in Faneuil Hall and the Old South Church, and without whose earnest and self-denying support there would have been no resistance to the frantic folly of George III., and no Revolution. He was one of the party which made the night of the 16th of December, 1773, famous by the destruction of the tea at Griffin's Wharf;* and he afterwards joined the Continental army when the siege of Boston was formed, and served long enough under Washington to help win the victories of Trenton and Princeton. Returned to Boston and to his trade, Sergeant Sprague brought up creditably a numerous family; and after an honorable life, rounded by a venerable old age, he died, in 1844, at the age of ninety-one.

Charles Sprague was, in the true and best sense of the words, a self-made man. This species of manufacture has fallen into such just discredit, from the inferior quality of the articles it has turned out of late years, and the mischief thus caused to our public affairs, that a shade of ridicule and contempt attaches to the term and to those to whom it is applied. But Mr. Sprague not only made himself, but he made himself well,—so well that few men with all the advantages of an elaborate education and learned leisure have better disciplined

* The account of the part which Samuel Sprague took in this famous transaction, as related by him to his son, is perhaps worth recording, as bringing the scene freshly to the mind. Young Sprague was then twenty years old, and yet in his apprenticeship. That evening, as he was on his way to pay a visit to one of his young female acquaintances,—I believe the young woman he afterwards married,—he was encountered by some lads hurrying along towards Griffin's Wharf, who told him that there was something going on there of a lively nature, they did not know exactly what. He joined them, and, on reaching the scene of action, found the Indians busy with the tea-chests. Wishing to have his share of the fun, he looked about for the means of disguising himself. Spying a low building with a stove-pipe by way of chimney, he climbed the roof, and putting his hand down the pipe brought up a quantity of soot with which he effectually blackened his face. Thus qualified, he joined the party and assisted in the work. Among the prominent actors he discovered his master, who also recognized his apprentice. No sign of recognition, however, was made on either side, and neither the next morning, when they met at their work, nor ever afterwards, did either of them make any allusion to their share in the proceedings of that night.

or better stored their minds than he. At ten years old he was sent to the Franklin School, where, for a part of the three years he spent there, he was under the tuition of Lemuel Shaw, afterwards the Chief Justice of Massachusetts. At thirteen his education was finished as far as specific teaching was concerned, and he was taken from school and placed in a counting-house to learn to win his bread. There he remained until he was nineteen, when, in 1810, he entered into business for himself as a grocer, in partnership with Mr. William B. Callender. In this occupation, honorable and useful, but not especially congenial to a poetical temperament, he bravely remained for five years. The return of peace in 1815, bringing with it a prospect of the revival of commercial prosperity which had been effectually crushed by the war of 1812 with England, afforded Mr. Sprague an opportunity to enter into business on a more extensive scale. One of the merchants, Mr. Matthew M. Hunt, in whose counting-room he had served his apprenticeship, proposed a partnership as importers, into which he entered, and in which he remained for four years. But the details and the minor moralities of trade, distasteful to him from the first, grew more and more irksome as time went on; and he preferred to exchange the possible gains and the inevitable anxieties of commerce for a permanent position, which would give him an assured support in return for industry, fidelity, and integrity in the service of others. With these views he took the place of first teller in the State Bank in 1819, and remained such until 1824, when he became the cashier of the Globe Bank, which was chartered in that year. This important post he held for forty years, discharging its duties in the most faithful, exact, punctual, and laborious manner. Never absent from his desk during the hours of business; keeping a watchful and sagacious eye on the conditions, healthful or feverish, of the money market; instinctively gauging the personal and pecuniary credit of mercantile men; courteous and friendly to anxious applicants for accommodation, but always placing the claims of the institution which virtually trusted him with the entire management of its affairs before those of good nature or of friendship, — he secured the approbation of his employers without forfeiting the respect and esteem even of those he was obliged to disappoint. During these long years he occupied a foremost place in the financial circles of Boston; and there was no man whose opinion as to men and measures, in money matters, was more sought after or more respected than his. He was one of a committee, appointed by the Governor of

the State, to consider the matter of bank-note plates, with a view to stop the extensive counterfeits circulating among the people; and he took a leading part in all the movements touching the management and improvement of banking affairs. Devoted to his work during the hours of business, absorbed in the duties of each day as it passed, they who knew him only in those busy moments little dreamt of the different world to which he fled from the turmoil of affairs, and in which his real life was passed.

Mr. Sprague, during these years of close application to business, found or made time for the careful cultivation of his mind by the study of good letters. The stolen hours of evenings, of midnights, or of early mornings, were passed in the society of the great geniuses who have illustrated the English tongue. He had taught himself the French language so as to read it easily, and he was not unacquainted with its best writers; but his intellectual refreshment was mainly drawn from "the well of English undefiled." Of English literature he may be said to have made himself master; and few professed scholars have possessed themselves of it more thoroughly in all its departments than he. The very limitation of his reading to his vernacular made his knowledge of whatever it contained all the more complete and exact, and gave his mind that discipline which Cicero commended, and which Gibbon regarded as the great advantage the ancients had over the moderns,—reading much rather than many things. That his favorite branch of English literature was its poetry need hardly be said. His knowledge of English poetry from its first dawn down to the present day was complete and exhaustive,—from Gower and Chaucer down to Byron and Wordsworth. Poetry he made his study rather than his amusement; and he learned the mechanism of the art, as well as imbibed its spirit, from close and critical examination of the works of the greatest masters. If he did not absolutely "lip in numbers," the "numbers came" early and easily, the solace and recreation of his well-earned leisure. His earliest appearances as a poet before the public were of a sufficiently unpretending kind. His infant muse did not attempt a lofty or a distant flight when she first tried the strength and buoyancy of her wings. During his pupilage he was far from being—

"A clerk ordained his father's soul to cross,
Who penned a stanza when he should engross;"

but he used the time which belonged to himself in the indulgence of his natural bent towards rhyme. His first effusions

saw the light in the "Poet's Corner" of the newspapers of the day, — that nook at once the birthplace and the grave of so many youthful ambitions. Some of these *juvenilia* have survived the usual fate of such "infants of the spring," and have worthily taken their place among his permanent works, — such as the tender lines entitled "Charles James," written on the anniversary of the death of his first-born child, and those addressed to his cigar, where he gives the countenance of song to the lovers of the fragrant weed. He also condescended to the low estate of the newspaper carriers, and sometimes wrote the addresses with which those humble ministers on the breakfast table used to salute their patrons on New Year's Day, fifty years ago.

While Mr. Sprague was yet busy with the cash of the State Bank as its first teller, the opportunity came which made his name known throughout the country. In 1821 the management of the Park Theatre, in New York, offered a prize for a prologue, to be pronounced on the opening night of the season. Mr. Sprague entered into this honorable competition, and the prize was adjudged to him by a literary committee which was ignorant of the names of the aspirants until its decision was arrived at. The great merit of this performance, which compared favorably with the best of the poems of this description which abounded in the last century, gave its author a high and well-deserved standing among the few American writers of that day. The next year, 1822, he again carried off the prize offered for an address of the same description for the opening of a Philadelphia Theatre. He had three other successes of a like nature within the next few years, after which he withdrew from participation in these literary contests, in which he had been uniformly the victor. In those days of smaller things and of fewer literary excitements, the offering of these theatrical prizes created a general interest which it may be hard to understand now; and, when the mail was due that was expected to bring the important decision, a crowd would gather round the post-office to get the first news of the adjudication. After his first success, no doubt their local pride in their native bard gave a keener edge to the curiosity of his friends and admirers, who received with congratulatory cheers the announcement of his name as that of the successful competitor. These prologues are in the best manner of the best of those occasional addresses, the fashion whereof hath passed away like that of the world in whose ears they were uttered. His vigorous verse, full of thought, enlivened by satiric touches and poetic fancies,

flowed in harmonious numbers, suited to the highest capacities and level to the lowest. Like all the poems of Sprague, in every mode of his lyre, their meaning was clear and unmistakable. Though his muse dwelt rather in the haunts of mankind than of Nature, and drew her inspiration from the ways and the emotions of men and from the depths of his own heart, his poetry, though introspective, was never obscure. He neither belonged to nor admired the later school of metaphysical poets whose subtleties evade the comprehension of the common mind, and demand an esoteric priesthood to expound its mysteries. The accents of the true singer, however lofty and remote from daily life the themes of his song, are ever attuned to the general ear, and commend themselves at once to the average intelligence of mankind.

In 1823 the managers of the Boston Theatre arranged a pageant in honor of the memory of Shakspeare, consisting of various scenes from his tragedies and comedies. To give additional dignity and interest to the entertainment, they offered a prize for an Ode in honor of the bard, to be recited at a proper interval of the performances. This prize was won by Mr. Sprague against numerous competitors, of whom no less than fourteen afterwards published their rejected addresses. Whatever may have been the merit of these productions, I believe the good judgment of the committee which adjudged the prize was not invalidated by any of them in the opinion of the public. Few poets of the time could have excelled the Shakspeare Ode in liveliness of imagination, freshness of fancy, variety of measures, felicity of phrase, and harmony of movement. It was thoroughly informed with the spirit of the theme, and it is praise enough to say that it was a worthy illustration of it. It was well recited on the evening of the 11th of February, 1824, by Henry J. Finn, an excellent actor and most estimable man, a personal friend of the poet, well remembered by all play-goers of middle age. He perished in the catastrophe of the steamer "Lexington" in the winter of 1839-40. The prize was a silver pitcher, suitably inscribed, and bearing the motto, "*Thrice to thine*," in allusion to the fact that it was the third prize won successively in poetic competition. This poem confirmed the general popularity of Mr. Sprague, and raised him to a higher point than he had yet gained in the opinion of competent critics. In 1818 he had furnished an ode for the triennial celebration of the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association, which was his first considerable public appearance as a poet, a performance very suitable for the occasion and very creditable to him

as a young writer. Six years later, after he had established his literary position by his prologues and the Shakspeare Ode, he wrote a second ode for the same association, entitled "Art," which marks strongly the great advance he had made in that space of time, both in maturity of mind and in technical skill as an artist. In my opinion, there are few finer poems in the English language than this ode; and Mr. John Quincy Adams did it but partial and prosaic justice in describing it as "an encyclopædia of description comprised in forty lines." In those forty lines the poet's pen has given a local habitation to what the poet's eye and soul had discerned of the marvels worked by art, and at once heightened and adorned them with the magical illusions of poetic fancy. It deserves a place in every anthology of English poetry.

Like most poets, Mr. Sprague was a graceful and vigorous writer of prose. The same command of language which is essential to the flexibility of poetry gives the poet a power of clothing his thoughts in clear and picturesque words, often denied to those whom "the gods have not made poetical." In 1825 Mr. Sprague gave the oration on the Fourth of July, the semi-centennial celebration of the breaking out of the Revolution. He was fortunate in this circumstance, as well as in the recent visit of Lafayette to lay the corner-stone of the monument on Bunker Hill, and in the survivorship of many veterans of the war, and of three of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, — Adams, Jefferson, and Carroll. The oration is a beautiful performance. The well-worn topics of the theme are managed with skill, an air of originality is dexterously thrown over the most trite ideas, and the whole informed with a poetical spirit while avoiding the temptation to poetical prose. This excellent performance shows how Mr. Sprague might have distinguished himself in this line of literature, had he inclined to pursue it.

In 1829 Mr. Sprague wrote the poem by which he has been perhaps the most widely known. It is the one entitled "Curiosity," delivered at Cambridge, before the Society of Phi Beta Kappa, of Harvard University, of which body he was elected an honorary member, — a distinction more sparingly given then than of late years. It is the longest of his works, written in the heroic measure, and containing about eight hundred lines. This masterly performance was not merely well adapted to the occasion, but well deserving of a permanent place in literature. Following the guidance of his theme, the poet glances at the various phases of life with a philosophy gilded by fancy, a satire tempered by tenderness,

according as Curiosity soars to the discovery of sublime truths, or stoops to pander to vitiated tastes, and all conveyed in graceful and vigorous verse. Though an occasional poem, generally an ephemeral race which perish in the utterance, Mr. Sprague evidently elaborated "Curiosity" with judicious pains, as well aware that it was to be a material element of his permanent fame. Had this poem appeared in England during the last century, when "Pleasures of Memory," and "Pleasures of Hope" made great reputations, the name of Sprague would have been classed at least alongside of those of Rogers and Campbell. At the Commencement of this year, held the day before the delivery of "Curiosity," Mr. Sprague had the honorary degree of Master of Arts conferred upon him by the University. In 1830 Mr. Sprague wrote and delivered the last of his longer poems,—an ode for the celebration of the two hundredth birthday of Boston. It is a work highly creditable to him, being a poetical glance at the past and the present of New England, with a warm tribute of admiration for the Puritan Fathers, tempered by poetic sympathy for the vanished race they supplanted. It is a production not unworthy to be classed with "Curiosity" and with the Shakspeare Ode, and that on Art; but perhaps it would hardly have made a permanent reputation for its author, had it stood alone.

Mr. Sprague received more than once the unequivocal, though dishonest, testimony of plagiarism to his merits as a writer. Not long after the publication of "Curiosity," it was reprinted in Calcutta as the original work of a British officer, with no other alterations than the substitution of British for American names, in some instances, such as "Scott" for "Cooper," and "Chalmers" for "Channing." In this form it was reprinted in London, and received much praise from some of the literary and critical periodicals. After the delivery of his Fourth of July Oration in 1825, a patriotic citizen in one of the Western States stole it bodily, and received great applause for his eloquent effort,—so great that it was published by request. This circumstance brought the larceny to the knowledge of the better-informed readers, and the ambitious orator was stripped of his stolen laurels.

Mr. Sprague was singularly careless as to the usual methods of obtaining notoriety for his works. The first collected edition of them appeared in New York, 1841, published by Mr. C. S. Francis, if not without the permission, certainly without the consent, of the author. The publisher says in his preface that "he had carried it through, only not forbidden

by the author himself, who, he hopes, will look with some complacency on the task which he would do nothing to promote." In a second edition, in 1850, the publisher states that the issuing of the first edition was somewhat hastened by the printing of an inferior edition in New York, without the author's knowledge, the sheets of which were purchased and destroyed by the publishers of this edition, in order that the writings of Mr. Sprague might appear in a style to satisfy his friends and admirers. In 1850 an edition of his poems was published by Messrs. Ticknor, Reed, & Fields, with the author's permission, and under his supervision. The writings of Sprague were reviewed at different times in the "North American Review," by William H. Prescott, the historian, the Rev. W. B. O. Peabody, and Edwin P. Whipple; and were honorably noticed in the "London Athenæum," in "Blackwood's Magazine," and other critical journals of eminence.

The lesser poems of Sprague, though few in number, will always keep his name fresh around many a fireside, and in many a secret chamber of grief or joy. The hearts which have been touched by sorrow and bereavement—as what heart has not been?—respond to the accents of his lyre when they treat of those domestic charities of father, son, and brother which come home to the bosoms of us all. "The Winged Worshippers," "I see Thee still," "The Family Meeting," "Lines to M. S. C.," are among the best-known and oftenest quoted of all the emotional writings of the American muse. The themes of which they treat find a responsive echo in every human heart; and the thoughts are couched in the tenderest, the most unstudied grace and purity of language. With the exception of a few of these domestic effusions, written under the influence of home and kindred, Mr. Sprague wrote nothing that saw the light after he was forty years old. This sudden stop in a literary career so brilliantly begun, when his life and his powers were at their prime, it is difficult to account for and impossible not to regret. He had the field nearly to himself in this country five and forty years ago, when he voluntarily retired from it. Dana had also ceased too soon to write. His eminent contemporary, Bryant, was the only rival likely at that time to contest the honors of the race with him. Longfellow had scarcely come in sight of the starting-post; Willis and Holmes had just escaped from college walls; Lowell was still a school-boy; Whittier was yet meditating the muse among the furrows of his father's farm; and Emerson, unprescient of the

splendor of his genius and his fame, was preaching the gospel of Unitarianism at the North End of Boston. I think no one can read the poems of Sprague, especially the lyrical ones, and not admit that nature had endowed him with poetic genius, and that he had gained the mastery of the English tongue to give it fit utterance, — that he had both “the Vision and the Faculty Divine.” All this he must have felt in his inmost mind; and he could not but know that he could reach a higher plane of merit and a much wider extent of reputation, should he devote himself exclusively to the cultivation of poetry. That he was not insensible to the charm of fame, nor ungrateful for the share which had been accorded to him, need not be said. That he was content with that share, when he must have felt that he could have won much more, is a rare instance of moderation and self-control, and perhaps of wisdom. Perhaps he felt that a life devoted to literature was not so well suited to the calm enjoyments of domestic life, in which he placed his chief happiness, as the routine of financial affairs which he had chosen for the occupation of his days. Perhaps he agreed with Scott that the practical business of life was a more worthy employment of man than an exclusive devotion to the arts which adorn and delight it. And it is not doubtful that the weight of successive bereavements and private sorrows depressed his ambition and damped his desire for fame, making him fall back on the distractions of business and on what was left to him of kindred and friends for the solace of many griefs. The consciousness of having won an honorable place among American writers was necessarily a source of just pride and satisfaction. But while he valued the good opinion of the world he lived in, he did not place his happiness in the breath of popular applause. He was never envious of the splendid successes of younger poets, nor was he much concerned lest his own voice should be lost amidst the throng

“Of louder minstrels in these latter days.”

He justly estimated the value of what he had given the world, and he had no uneasiness lest the world should not give him his fair share of credit for it. He would often say, in his later years, that the world had treated him well, and given him his full meed of applause. It can never be said of Sprague, as it was of Cowper, that he would never have found the way to fame if he had not missed the way to happiness. What was our loss through the moderation of his literary ambition was doubtless his gain in the tranquil happiness of his modest and useful life.

That life was prolonged for nearly forty-five years after he had thus taken leave of the muse. They were years of active devotion to the institution which had confided its interests to his care, and to the discharge of his duties as a good citizen and as the faithful father of a family. He dispensed, as cashier of the Globe Bank, eighty semi-annual dividends during the forty years of his stewardship. After so many years of devoted service to his bank, it was natural and reasonable that he should wish for a season of rest and retirement. Besides, a change had come over the methods of the business he had so long successfully conducted. The system of national banks, introduced by Secretary Chase, which placed these institutions under the supervision of the general government instead of the several States, caused a change in the details of bank management which he preferred to leave to younger hands. He had, too, been struck by the pole of an omnibus in the back, which injured the spine and made locomotion difficult and painful. For the last ten years of his life he scarcely left his house, and for several of the later ones not at all. Happily he was in no danger of suffering from that lassitude and *ennui* which so often visit men who have spent their lives in active business, when they abandon it for an old age of leisure. During the long years of his life of affairs, books and reading had been the refreshment of his leisure and the alleviation of his griefs. From his boyhood he had been a buyer of books, his slender pocket-money and petty earnings finding their way to the book-stall or the auction-room from the beginning. In the course of his long life he had collected a large and most useful library, comprising the body of English literature, and, though no bibliomaniac, many rare and curious books. His house, as I knew it in his old age, seemed to overflow with them. There were none for show or vanity; all were for service, bearing marks of abundant and loving use. As they had been the friends and companions of the leisure of his active life, they continued almost to the last their friendship and companionship during the long leisure of his old age and enforced retirement. Their society was the more precious to him because of the many hours which he had to spend in his own society and theirs, as he sat, — in the touching words of his son to me, respecting the last year of his life, — “a sick and utterly solitary man, after a brilliant life, after the loss of nearly all dear to him, looking out upon the patch of sky and roofs of houses, condemned to hours and hours of solitude and silence, in the house which was once so gay and bright with music, chat, life; then so silent

and tomb-like!" My own personal and particular acquaintance with him began within those later years of his life; and, until the last year or thereabouts, whenever I visited him there was nothing sad or sorrowful in his appearance or demeanor. But naturally his visitors saw him at his best and cheerfulest under the pleasant excitement of society and conversation. For, though many of the hours of the day and evening must have been passed in solitude, no day went over his head without being cheered by visits of friendship and affection. I always found him cheerful and animated, seated in his elbow-chair, reading good old authors, which he preferred to the newer ones, surrounded by books which occupied every available shelf or table, by pictures and objects of art, apparently the very image of happy old age. He certainly had all that should accompany it, as "honor, love, obedience, troops of friends." His conversation was extremely lively and entertaining, notwithstanding great and increasing deafness. His talk was of books, of old Boston, the old merchants and old actors, and of the odd characters in which it seemed to abound in his younger days; of every thing, indeed, excepting politics and business, neither of which he seemed to regard as worth an old man's thoughts or breath. It was a refreshment to pass from the turmoil of State Street and the noise of Washington Street, in which he lived, into a nook about which the heady currents of politics and money-making eddied, but did not enter.

But the old age of Mr. Sprague needed all the alleviations of filial affection and friendship and books to make it tolerable. To be confined for years within the four walls of a city house, looking out upon a narrow street, after a life of constant activity in the busiest haunts of men, was a trial of no small severity. And, besides the suffering incident to his later accident and the helplessness it involved, he had met with an injury in his boyhood to his left eye, which entirely destroyed its sight, after a season of great suffering. Though, happily, the hurt did not affect the use of the surviving eye, which did him yeoman's service by day and by night to the last, it continued to give him painful reminders of its occurrence from time to time. In 1851 he lost his eldest daughter, Elizabeth, the wife of Mr. Ezra Lincoln, a blow the severity of which he never ceased to feel with all the keenness of a sensitive nature; and in 1862 his wife also died, after a happy union of nearly fifty years. The doom of man was not reversed for him. To all these infirmities and bereavements he submitted with the resignation of a wise and courageous

spirit. He met them with a sweetness and patience which could not be surpassed. He never complained or repined, nor expressed any sense of weariness of life, until the shadow of death was overtaking him. He had no fear of death at any time, and welcomed its approach at the last as a happy release from his many afflictions. When asked by his son what word he had to send to his old friends in State Street, he answered, "Tell them I am ready!" It was a self-taught philosophy that he opposed to the sorrows and sufferings of his latter years, and one that had no support outside of his own mind. He had reached long since, through the operations of his own thoughts, the doctrines more recently promulgated by Tyndall and Huxley and Mill, and those who claim to be the "advanced thinkers" of the age. Though he never attempted to propagate his rationalistic opinions, he always ingenuously avowed them; and he enjoined it upon me not to conceal them, should I be appointed to write his biographical notice for our Transactions. Had it not been for this injunction, I might perhaps have passed over in silence his speculations as to the nature, the origin, and the destiny of man, as matters with which we have no concern, excepting as they illustrate the mental independence with which he formed his opinions, and the moral courage with which he avowed them. All who value American literature are indebted to Charles Sprague for the contributions he has made to it, adding to the innocent pleasures of his readers while refining their tastes, elevating their sentiments, and strengthening their purpose in verse which will command its due share of fame, as it has already won its meed of popular favor. The only regret we can feel, in reviewing what he has written, is, that he did not write more. Those who knew him as a man of affairs will bear witness to the high sense of personal honor, the unbending spirit of financial integrity, the keen sagacity and instinctive insight and the indefatigable industry which he brought to the transactions of business. But they who saw him the most intimately in the passages of his private life, in manhood, and in old age, will ever regard the daily beauty of his domestic life, the warmth and fidelity of his friendships, his wise and unostentatious beneficence, his patient and uncomplaining endurance of mental and bodily sufferings of no common severity, and his constant and earnest endeavors to make all the lives happy that came within his reach, as giving him a title beyond all besides to their enduring love and admiration.